

## Data for Improvement

# SEL Assessment Decision-Making Checklist

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Use this checklist to evaluate formal social and emotional learning assessment tools. The checklist will help you evaluate practical, logistical, and technical considerations for each tool that you are considering.

## Why This Matters

- The best assessment tool for your program is the one that aligns with your goals and is practical to use.
- The checklist is designed to raise awareness of considerations that may be important in your decision-making process.

## Getting Started

- Evaluate your readiness to make use of a formal assessment tool. Read the [\*Assessing Social & Emotional Skills in Out-of-School Time Settings: Considerations for Practitioners\*](#) issue brief for more information.
- Use the checklist to determine your priorities (cost, time, usefulness, reporting, etc.) in selecting a tool. Not all checklist items will carry equal weight for every program.

## How To Use It

- 1) Review the items on the checklist as you evaluate formal social and emotional learning measurement tools.
- 2) Take time to investigate answers to questions that are most important to your program.
- 3) Request sample surveys, measurement instruments, and reports of tools that you are seriously considering.
- 4) Make a decision based on your program priorities and measurement needs.

## Take It Further

- Ask 2-3 additional staff to review the checklist in order to evaluate the measurement tools you are seriously considering. Discuss your findings and make a collaborative decision.
- Ask youth leaders to review potential evaluation tools. Include youth in the decision about which tool to use.
- Ask for input from funders and other stakeholders who are invested in your program's SEL outcomes.

# Tool: SEL Assessment Decision-Making Checklist

Use this checklist to evaluate and compare formal SEL assessment tools.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS	WHY THIS MATTERS
<input type="checkbox"/> Do the items measured by this tool align with our program goals?	The closer the alignment between what the tool measures and your program goals, the more helpful the data will be to youth and practitioners.
<input type="checkbox"/> Will the tool provide helpful feedback to youth and actionable data for practitioners?	Receiving helpful feedback is an important part of developing social and emotional skills. Actionable data will help practitioners make better decisions about program design and youth interactions. Reports that only provide data in spreadsheets or complicated tables will be more difficult to use.
<input type="checkbox"/> Does the tool align with our program’s definition of success in SEL?	There is not a universal standard of success in SEL. What counts as SEL success will vary based on the values and goals of each program. Alignment between the tool's standard of success and your program standard is important.
<input type="checkbox"/> How accessible is the actual tool that youth or practitioners are required to complete?	The visual design of the tool and the formatting of measurement items matters. If the tool is burdensome or confusing to complete, the quality of responses will be affected.

## The bottom line: Will this tool help you improve outcomes for youth?

Only consider tools that will help your program become more effective.

Notes:

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LOGISTICAL CONSIDERATIONS	WHY THIS MATTERS
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>How much does the tool cost? (per youth/per year)</b>	Pricing is not standard across tools. Calculate the per youth/per year cost for each youth in order to compare differing price structures.
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>What are the training requirements for practitioners and associated costs?</b>	Training requirements vary widely and can add considerable time and money to the cost of using a tool.
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>How is the tool administered? How many items or questions are included?</b>	Some tools must be completed on a computer, others on paper. Paper-based tools increase the amount of data entry time required. The number of items on a tool will significantly impact the time and energy it takes to implement a tool.
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>How quickly will you get access to the data?</b>	Some reports can be generated immediately. Others will take weeks or even months to create. If you intend to use data for program improvement, getting quick access to data reports may be an important consideration.

### The bottom line: Do you have the capacity (money + time) to meaningfully use this assessment tool?

The best measurement tool is the one that you can actually use.

Notes:

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TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS	WHY THIS MATTERS
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>What is the reliability score of the tool?</b>	Look for a tool with high reliability and administrative requirements that you can reasonably manage. Tools that have high reliability will provide more consistent results. You can find this information in a technical report or directly from the publisher.
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>What is the validity score of the tool?</b>	Validity scores indicate how accurately the tool measures the outcomes or skills it claims to measure. For example, if a tool claims to assess problem-solving skills, but only includes questions related to emotion management, this would be a red flag. You can find this information in the technical report or directly from the publisher.
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Do you agree with the underlying theories that inform the assessment items?</b>	Consider how the tool's authors define social emotional skills. How the authors understand effective communication or healthy relationships will influence how the tool is designed and scored.

### The bottom line: How valid is the tool for your context?

While a tool may have high technical scores, the data and feedback you receive will have limited usefulness if it doesn't align with your goals, values, or population. For example, if the tool you are considering was developed with a sample population that was primarily middle school youth in rural areas, it will not have high validity for your urban high school program.

Notes:

Adapted from:

Blyth, D., & Flaten, K. (2016). Assessing social and emotional skills in out-of-school time settings: considerations for practitioners. Retrieved from University of Minnesota, Extension Center for Youth Development website: <http://www.extension.umn.edu/youth/research/sel/docs/issue-brief-assessing-sel-in-out-of-school-time-settings.pdf>

Soland, J., Hamilton, L.S., & Stecher, B.M. Measuring 21st century competencies: guidance for educators. (2013). Asia Society and Rand Corporation. Retrieved from <https://asiasociety.org/files/gcen-measuring21cskills.pdf>